



The European Commission outlines strategic plans for European co-operation on education and training

Ecswe contribution to the European debate on the future of education and on the importance of creativity

Following the September 2008 edition of ECSWE news, the European Commission published in December 2008 "**An updated strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training**". This is an important document which identifies long-term challenges to guide policy co-operation for the next decade. It outlines suggestions on how education and training can contribute to the EU's wider reform projects, the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs and the renewed Social Agenda. The paper also outlines the most urgent priorities which merit particular attention in 2009 and 2010.

The European Commission invited ECSWE (as official European level stakeholder) and other 80 representatives from European Stakeholders organisations and social partners on the 9th of February 2009 in Brussels, in order to get feed back on this document.

Christopher Clouder and Werner Govaerts from ECSWE attended the Forum. Christopher Clouder was chosen as "rapporteur" of one of the 4 Workshops of the Forum. The group underlined that the utilitarian tone, the primary emphasis on the labour market and on economic needs is still very strong in the document and it is limiting for the strategy.

His full summary will be in the next newsletter. The Final report of the Forum will be available soon from ECSWE office (ecswe@waldorf.net). Interestingly this time the European level NGOs were consulted before the documents are to be submitted

to national governments and the Council of Ministers. This change is due to the resolution of Directorate-General for Education and Culture (DG EAC) and the Commission to broaden the involvement of relevant stakeholders.

In January there was a validation workshop with 30 European experts on creativity organised by the same DG. Christopher Clouder was invited as one of these in the area of education as previously he had been asked to give input to the educational section of the report "The Impact of Art and Culture on Creativity", which was undertaken by a private research consultancy KEA on behalf of the Commission. It will be laid before them in the coming weeks and then published.

Up to now creativity has been a low priority in EU policy making, in contrast to innovation where there has been a large amount of investment. This is about to change and creativity in teaching has been designated as a strategic priority in the Lisbon process (see below) and ECSWE is closely following the European Year of Creativity and Innovation 2009 to see where we can make further contributions. One of the working definitions of creativity underlying the report, which will influence policy making in the years to come, is "Imaginative activity fashioned so as to produce outcomes that are both original and of value". Naturally every definition is contestable and, as was forcefully stated, what cannot be measured has to be featured as much as that which can

be assessed. However if energetically taken up this has serious implications for the cultural sector, including education, and all those present, including the EU officials were determined it would be.

Summary of the updated strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training

While the responsibility for education and training lies with national governments, some challenges are common to all EU countries and the EU's strategy emphasises countries working together and learning from each other. The focus is on exchanging good practice and developing common tools, in order to face common challenges.

There are joint targets to measure the progress made by education and training systems at European level and these include: the reading literacy of 15 year-olds, early school leavers and the participation of adults in lifelong learning. The Commission proposes to review these benchmarks and to consider new benchmarks in more key areas such as tertiary education attainment, employability and student mobility.

Recent data shows that some EU Member States perform at a level comparable to the best in the world, but the poor performance of others means that issues such as reading literacy and early school leaving remain substantial challenges for Europe.

Every sixth young person still leaves school with only compulsory education or less. Many learners with a migrant background succeed less well in education and training than their native peers. Adults with low levels of education are seven times less likely to be engaged in continuing education and training than those with high levels.

Long term strategic challenges and immediate priorities:

On the basis of its consultations, the Commission proposes that European cooperation in education and training should address four strategic challenges in the years to 2020:

1) Make lifelong learning and learner mobility a reality:

- By implementing national lifelong learning strategies;
- by focusing on learning outcomes (i.e. on what a learner knows, understands and is able to do rather than the learning process itself)
- by establishing flexible learning pathways, e.g. through better transitions between VET and higher education, opening universities to non-traditional learners or the validation of non-formal learning
- by cross-border learner mobility.

Priority themes to be highlighted in 2009-10:

- Lifelong learning strategies: giving particular attention to the validation of non formal and informal learning and guidance.
- European Qualifications Framework (EQF): Link all national qualifications systems to the EQF by 2010 and support the use of an approach based on learning outcomes for standards and qualifications, assessment and validation procedures, credit transfer, curricula and quality assurance.
- Expanding learning mobility.

2) Improve the quality and efficiency of provision and outcomes.

- The major challenge is to ensure the acquisition of key competences by everyone;
- the teaching profession must become a more attractive career choice;
- education and training institutions

should be given greater autonomy, be more open to the civil society and enterprises and should be subject to effective systems of quality assurance.

Priority themes to be highlighted in 2009-10:

- Languages: To enable citizens to communicate in two languages in addition to their mother tongue, promote language teaching and give migrants the opportunity to learn the language of the host country.
- Professional development of teachers and trainers.
- Governance and funding.
- Basic skills in reading, mathematics and science: Set up a high-level group on literacy to investigate the problems behind the decline in reading performance among school pupils and make recommendations to improve literacy levels across the EU. Intensify existing cooperation to improve the take-up of maths and science at higher levels of education and training, and to strengthen science teaching.
- "New Skills for New Jobs": Ensure that the assessment of future skill requirements and the matching of labour market needs are fully taken on board in all education and training planning processes.

3) Promote equity and active citizenship.

- Educational disadvantage can be addressed by high quality pre-primary education and targeted support;
- education should promote inter-cultural skills, democratic values, the respect of fundamental rights and the fight against discrimination, equipping all young people to interact positively with their peers from diverse backgrounds.

Priority themes to be highlighted in 2009-10:

- Early school leaving: Strengthen preventive approaches, build closer cooperation between general and vocational sectors and remove barriers for drop-outs to return to education and training.
- Pre-primary education: Promote generalised equitable access and reinforce quality of provision and teacher support.

- Migrants: Develop mutual learning on best practices for education of children from a migrant background.
- Learners with special needs: Promote personalised learning through timely support and well coordinated services. Integrate services within mainstream schooling and ensure pathways to further education and training.

4) Enhance innovation and creativity, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.

- A first challenge is to ensure that all citizens can acquire transversal key competences such as learning-to-learn and communication skills, a sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, digital competence (incl. media literacy), cultural awareness and expression;
- the second challenge is to ensure a fully functioning knowledge triangle of education-research-innovation.

Priority themes to be highlighted in 2009-10:

- Transversal key competences: Integrate transversal key competences fully into curricula, assessment and qualifications.
- Innovation-friendly institutions: Promote creativity and innovation through developing specific teaching and learning methods (including the use of new ICT tools and teacher training).
- Partnership: Develop partnerships between education and training providers and businesses, research institutions, cultural actors and creative industries.

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